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U.S., Soviet Competition in '80s For Mideast Oil Predicted by CIA

Associated Press

CIA Director Stansfield Turner, in rare public testimony before the Senate Energy Committee, yesterday painted a gloomy picture of worldwide oil supplies through the 1980s.

Turner said Soviet and U.S. demands for energy "sets the stage for East-West competition for Mideast oil."

Because the Soviet Union will go from being an oil-exporting to an oil-importing nation over the next few years, Soviet leaders face "extremely painful" economic, political and military choices, the Central Intelligence Agency chief said.

The Soviet Union is the world's biggest oil producer, pumping 11.7 million barrels daily in 1979, Turner said. Production will "probably peak this year at less than 12 million barrels daily and begin falling next year."

That means the Soviet Union and its dependent Eastern European nations will begin competing on world markets for oil, already in short supply.

The oil crunch, he said, will put pressure on Soviet leaders to use "forceful action, ranging from covert subversion to intimidation" and military action.

Turner predicted that the Soviets will try to trade for oil at reduced prices by offering to sell weapons or other commodities to oil-producing nations.

Turner was pressed hard by committee members to predict that the United States will face a major cutoff of oil imports.

"The possibility certainly does exist," Turner said. "It certainly can happen."